

News

United States
Department
of Labor



Bureau of Labor Statistics

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MARCH 2004 CONSUMER PRICE INDEXES FOR ENERGY, SHELTER, AND FOOD AT HOME HOUSTON-GALVESTON-BRAZORIA, TEXAS

Energy costs in the Houston-Galveston-Brazoria metropolitan area advanced 0.8 percent during March, while shelter costs increased 0.7 percent, and food at home (grocery) prices were unchanged, the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S Department of Labor reported today. Acting Regional Commissioner Hal Corley noted that because these short-term changes are not adjusted for seasonal variation, consumers and businesses should be cautious in drawing conclusions about long-term retail price trends.

The 0.8-percent rise in energy costs followed substantially larger gains of 4.1 percent and 1.9 percent in January and February, respectively. The biggest factor in the March increase was higher gasoline prices as the index rose 1.7 percent. During the first three months of 2004, gasoline costs rose 15.2 percent after falling 10.7 percent in the last three months of 2003. Despite the recent increases, gasoline costs were still 0.9 percent below the year-ago level. The average price of a gallon of gasoline stood at \$1.635 in March. Electricity also contributed to the monthly rise as prices edged up 0.1 percent. The cost of utility natural gas was unchanged in March. During the previous 12 months, electricity prices rose 20.3 percent and natural gas prices increased 12.7 percent. These advances were slowed somewhat by the annual decline in gasoline and left the total energy index 8.8 percent higher over the year.

Grocery store costs held steady in March after falling 0.9 percent in February. Higher prices for breakfast cereals, fresh vegetables -- particularly tomatoes, and selected cuts of pork, were balanced by declines for fresh fruits -- especially apples and citrus fruits, eggs, and selected dairy products. During the year ended in March, grocery store prices rose 4.9 percent placing the food at home index (CPI-U, 1982-84=100) at 178.1. The index means that a typical basket of grocery items priced at \$100.00 in 1982-84 cost area consumers \$178.10 last month.

Houston Energy, Shelter, & Food At Home Consumer Price Indexes – March 2004 (Cont'd)

The shelter component rose 0.7 percent in March after surging 4.1 percent in February. Rent of a primary residence (renters' costs) increased 0.2 percent while owners' equivalent rent (homeowners' costs) was unchanged. A sharp rise in costs for lodging away from home -- specifically hotel and motel charges -- was the biggest contributor to the monthly shelter gain. Over the year, renters' costs increased 2.0 percent and homeowners' costs were up 3.7 percent. Combined with higher costs for lodging away from home, the total shelter index advanced 6.4 percent during the previous 12 months.